

BELMONT HISTORIC DISTRICT COMMISSION

October 7, 2004

Town Hall

Meeting Minutes

Commission Members Attending: Co-chairs Richard Cheek and Lydia Ogilby, Paul Bell, Lisa Harrington, Linn Hobbs, Arleyn Levee, Richard Pichette, Michael Smith, Sharon Vanderslice. Associate Member: Matthew Genta. Absent: Nancy Richards.

Residents Attending: Joseph Cornish, 10 Cedar Road; Kit and Ted Dreier, 11 Howells Road; Victoria Haase, 346 Concord Avenue; Sam Knight, 660 Concord Avenue; Eudora Woodward, 24 Kenmore Road.

PRESERVATION OF HISTORIC OUTBUILDINGS

Kit Dreier and Sam Knight, representing a group of concerned citizens, read a statement in support of an amendment to the Town's Zoning Bylaw that would encourage adaptive reuse of historic barns and carriage houses in Belmont. They also circulated a draft of this amendment, designated as Section 6.12 *Distinctive Structures Preservation* (attached). Richard Cheek commented that such an amendment would be desirable if it encouraged the preservation of structures outside the Historic District. Other members said that the bylaw might have unintended consequences. They were concerned that:

1. The proposed section 6.12.4, which would permit subdivision of properties too small to divide under current zoning law, would apply to only one property in town and could therefore be considered spot zoning, a violation of the law.
2. Subdivision of properties was exactly what the HDC was trying to discourage.
3. There was no language in the amendment that protected historic landscapes around these barns or carriage houses.
4. The term "other approved use" in section 6.12.4 was too vague and that all approved uses should be defined.
5. The term "in a reasonable manner" in section 6.12.5 was too vague; preservation guidelines should match those published by the National Park Service.
6. It was unclear at what point in the process the HDC would be able to review the proposed renovations, and it was unclear who would have the final say regarding the impact these changes would have on the architectural integrity of the structure.
7. The amendment should not be dependent on whether or not renovation is economic feasible, as this is impossible to determine in individual cases without knowing the owner's net worth.
8. Having the amendment apply in perpetuity to buildings more than 100 years old might not be appropriate.

Michael Smith asked to see a list of properties to which the amendment might currently apply. Mrs. Dreier said she would submit a list of properties to Mr. Cheek by email.

509 PLEASANT STREET

Attending: Nushin Yazdi

This 1951 post-modern house, designed by Marjorie Pierce and formerly owned by Harvard economics professor and Secretary of Labor John Dunlop, sits on just over an acre of land at the end of a long shared driveway. It is in the Historic District but has limited visibility from Pleasant Street. Ms. Yazdi, a prospective buyer, asked if the Historic District Commission would allow her to add a second story to the house. She presented some preliminary sketches. Two member architects, Mr. Smith and Mr. Bell, said that they thought a second story addition would be inappropriate for a classic, one-story ranch house, but other members felt that a second story could be added, if done sympathetically and placed over the back half of the house, as Ms. Yazdi was proposing. Mr. Cheek said that although the HDC would endeavor to give her an idea of the general scale and materials that might be considered appropriate for an addition, the Commission could only grant a Certificate of Appropriateness to the actual owner of the house upon submission and approval of the final drawings for the addition. Because of the limited visibility of the house from the public way, he would check with the Massachusetts Historical Commission regarding the HDC's jurisdiction in such a case, but he indicated that lines of sight were often determined without regard to vegetation that might lie in between the public way and the building.

B STREET AFFORDABLE HOUSING

Attending: Betsy Miessner of WATCH, Inc.

Ms. Miessner, representing WATCH, a private nonprofit company that coordinates the construction of affordable housing, presented proposed designs for two two-family homes on town-owned land on B Street and asked the HDC to comment on their appropriateness to the neighborhood. Both houses were designed by Katherine MacPhail of dEmios in Belmont. 15-16 B Street would be three stories tall with two small porches and would contain one market-rate unit and one affordable unit. The smaller structure at 26-28 B Street would have two affordable units, one of which would be accessible to the disabled. After the Commission reviewed the plans, Richard Cheek made a motion that the design plans as presented be approved because the houses were appropriate in their siting, scale, proportion, and materials to the other houses in the neighborhood. Richard Pichette seconded the motion, which was then approved unanimously.

PLEASANT STREET LIGHTING

Attending: Chris Ripman of Ripman Lighting Consultants and Arthur Wolfson, both residents of Pleasant Street

Mr. Ripman was hired by the Belmont Municipal Light Department to propose several possible designs for new lighting poles and fixtures, which would be installed in the Historic District when this road is reconstructed. He said that there are no historic precedents for luminaires in Belmont. The oldest light poles on the street are square, are outside the Historic District, and date to the time when the street was first electrified. The street now has drop-lens, cobra-head fixtures attached to telephone poles spaced 200 to 225 feet apart. These fixtures have prisms that spread light outward in what appears to be a uniform manner, but they create glare and spill light in unwanted directions. His first proposal (newer flat lenses on a cobra-head fixture) would eliminate glare by preventing light from shining sideways out of the fixture. Along a roadway, this flat-lens fixture creates pools of light with patches of darkness in between. However, if the specified fixture is bright enough, the town would not need to increase the frequency of the poles to adequately light the street. Contemporary blue-green metal halide lighting, recently installed in the parking lot behind Belmont Center, allows people to see better in low light conditions because it approximates the moonlight that the human eye has evolved to see by at night. Mr. Ripman presented two other choices: a teardrop fixture of the sort recently installed along Fresh Pond Parkway in Cambridge and a full-cutoff fixture to be used on existing poles supplemented by pedestrian scale fixtures on the opposite side of the road as is done in Central Square in Cambridge. HDC members thought these last two proposals were too stylized and thus inappropriate for what used to be a rural byway. They favored the Ripman proposal RLC-101-A, a metal halide cutoff cobra head with a drop prism, as the least conspicuous. If such fixtures are mounted on new poles, the poles should be black, Commission members said, and all other street fixtures should be painted this color, including the backs of signs. If these fixtures are mounted on existing telephone poles, they should be cast aluminum. Arthur Wolfson asked whether any reductions had been made in the number of proposed signs along the street, as requested earlier. Rick Pichette will talk with Mr. Wolfson about follow-up with the Director of Community Development, Glenn Clancy. The state plans to open bids for this reconstruction project on October 13.

PRESERVATION RESTRICTION ON WAVERLEY FIRE STATION

Lisa Harrington presented a draft of this Preservation Restriction. Commission members suggested that two features be spelled out: the need to retain the Art Deco fire station door on the front of the building and the need to encourage restoration of the cupola to its original condition. Any further comments should be sent to Ms. Harrington by October 12. She will then forward the draft to the Massachusetts Historical Commission and to Roger Colton of the Waverley Fire Station Re-use Steering Committee for review.

LIBRARY SITE PLANNING

Paul Bell updated the Commission on a proposal to construct a new library on Concord Avenue. The site plan under consideration calls for a two-story library of 50,000 square feet built into the side of the hill below the Wellington School. Under this plan, the

Underwood pool would be relocated to the site on which the library now stands, which was formerly the location of a pond similar in size and configuration to the Underwood pool.

The Library Site Planning Committee considered several potential sites for a new library but ultimately supported the above referenced proposal for the following reasons:

1. The present library site is not large enough to support the proposed new library and related parking requirements. Also, since the new library should last for more than 100 years, any library plan must allow for expansion in the future.
2. Choosing a new site for the library would allow the present library to stay in continuous use until construction of the new library is completed, thus saving library relocation costs and providing greater user convenience.
3. Since the present swimming pool needs to be completely rebuilt, it was felt that this necessity provided an opportunity to build a new pool with the same shape in a different but similar “park-like” setting. Although, from a preservation perspective, this alternative is not as desirable as rebuilding the pool in place, it was regarded as a worthwhile compromise that would allow the Town to build the state-of-the-art library that it needs while providing Belmont with a better summer swimming facility commensurate in character with the older pool.

Victoria Haase, whose property at 346 Concord abuts the town-owned land under discussion, said she was disturbed by the proposal because it would relocate “the oldest outdoor municipal pool in America,” a pool that was donated to the town by her family. She said that the plan also expanded the existing parking lot and reduced the amount of green space in the area. Mr. Bell noted that by placing a majority of the required parking under the new library, the Site Planning Committee hoped to **maintain** the amount of green space on the combined library/pool site without increasing surface parking.

Minutes recorded by Sharon Vanderslice.

Good evening. Thank you for putting us on your Agenda for tonight's meeting. I am Kit Dreier. I am a Town Meeting Member, Vice President of the Belmont Land Trust, and a Trustee of the Judith K. Record Memorial Conservation Fund. I want to introduce Sam Knight, who is a founding member and Treasurer of the Belmont Land Trust. He has also served as Treasurer of Historic Massachusetts and formerly was a member and chairman of the Arlington Historic District Commission. As an attorney he has been an invaluable editor in the drafting process.

We represent a group of residents interested in the preservation of the historic fabric of our community, including, specifically, historic barns and carriage houses. And we value the role and the work of the HDC to that end.

We have followed with interest the Aguilers' proposal to convert their nineteenth century barn to residential use, as the only economically feasible way of preserving it. As you know, the proposal worked its way through HDC procedures as well as two separate applications to the Belmont Zoning Board of Appeals. The ZBA was not able to grant relief to the Aguilers under either an application for a subdivision or for a cluster development, due to a close reading of the Belmont Zoning Bylaw. On both occasions, the then chairman of the ZBA, Mr. John Gahan, stated that the best course of action would be to go to the town meeting with a zoning bylaw amendment which would allow issuance of a Special Permit regulating "adaptive reuse" of historic structures within prescribed guidelines.

Following his advice we have drafted a "Distinctive Structures Preservation Bylaw" which I believe you have all received.

We sought advice from Tim Higgins, Belmont's Senior Planner, and contacted a number of surrounding towns. We studied the Bylaws of Carlisle, Chilmark, Brookline, Concord, Lexington and Amherst. And we talked to zoning specialists and professional preservationists here and in other Massachusetts towns and other states as well as preservation organizations.

Clearly, the Historic District Commission should play an important role in the process we are proposing. You, the Commissioners, have the knowledge, experience and expertise to contribute substantially to a carefully laid out process by which a distinctive structure, such as a barn or carriage house, could be granted a Special Permit for its "adaptive reuse". You will note that the HDC would be involved early in the process, in some cases, to designate a distinctive structure. And, as a last step, HDC would review the architectural plans of the project for appropriateness.

We are here to discuss the draft Bylaw with you and to answer any questions you may have. We hope that you will wish to join us in working to achieve an important piece of the overall goal that many residents share with you, as you work to protect and preserve the cultural fabric of our historic town.

BYLAW DRAFT # 8 (Sept. 28,2004)

Section 6.12 Distinctive Structures Preservation

6.12.1 Purpose: The purpose of this section is to foster the preservation of Distinctive Structures in Belmont by permitting their re-use for purposes which make their restoration economically feasible but may not otherwise be provided for in the Zoning Bylaw.

6.12.2 Definition: A "Distinctive Structure" shall mean and refer to a non-residential accessory building, over 100 years old, which is of historical or architectural significance, including, but not limited to, free-standing barns, carriage houses or other major outbuildings. Such accessory structures which have been listed on the National Register or State Inventory of Historic Places or which are within the Belmont Historic District and have been deemed a contributing factor to the district shall be included in this definition. Other structures, including those listed on Belmont's Cultural Resources Inventory, may be specifically designated a Distinctive Structure by vote of the Historic District Commission to be so included.

6.12.3 Applicability: The Planning Board shall hear all petitions for the alteration and/or re-use of a Distinctive Structure through the Special Permit approval process. The Board shall request written comments from the Historic District Commission on each such application.

6.12.4 Special Permit: The Planning Board may grant a Special Permit to adapt any such Distinctive Structure as a residence, a home office, or other approved use, to be either used by the owner or leased as may be determined by the Board. The Special Permit may also allow a subdivision which creates one lot which conforms to existing area and frontage requirements for the applicable zoning district and a second lot which shall have not less than 75% of such area and frontage requirements.

6.12.5 Approval Criteria: Approvals for the adaptive re-use of a Distinctive Structure shall comply with the following criteria, as well as with those that are applicable under Section 7.4:

- (a) That the historic integrity and appearance of the Distinctive Structure are retained in a reasonable manner.
- (b) That any subdivision of the property containing the Distinctive Structure permitted hereunder shall not adversely affect the historic or architectural integrity of either the primary residence or the structure itself.
- (c) The Board may require that a preservation restriction on said structure be granted to the Town or other appropriate body or preservation organization under the provisions of Chapter 184 of the General Laws of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts.

6.12.6 Historic District Commission Oversight: Subsequent to the issuance of a Special Permit by the Planning Board, the proposed architectural plans shall be reviewed for appropriateness by the Belmont Historic District Commission, in the same manner and in accordance with the powers and procedures granted to it under Article 15 of the Bylaws and under the "Rules and Regulations" drawn up by the Belmont Historic District Commission dated (_____).